

## 266 SOME CUSTOMS OF THE PELEW ISLANDERS NOTIV

commons. The supply of *Mespil* is generally kept up by the purchase of slave girls from the neighbouring districts."\* According to another account a *mespil* "must always be stolen, by force or cunning, from a district at some distance from that wherein her captors reside. After she has been fairly, or unfairly, captured and installed in her new home, she loses no shade of respect among her own people; on the contrary, have not her beauty and her worth received the highest proof of her exalted perfection, In the devotion, not of one, but of a whole community of lovers?"<sup>2</sup> However, though the girl is nominally stolen from another district, the matter is almost always arranged privately with the local chief, who consents to wink hard at the theft in consideration of a good round sum of shell money and stone money, which serves "to salve the wounds of a disrupted family and dispel all thoughts of a bloody retaliation. Nevertheless, the whole proceeding is still carried out with the greatest possible secrecy and stealth."<sup>3</sup>

In the Pelew Islands the heir to the chieftainship of a clan has a formal right to slay his predecessor.

### § 3. Custom of slaying Chiefs

In the Pelew Islands when the chief of a clan has reigned too long or has made himself unpopular, the heir has a formal right to put him to death, though for reasons which will appear this right is only exercised in some of the principal clans. The practice of regicide, if that word may be extended to the assassination of chiefs, is in these islands a national institution regulated by exact rules, and every high chief must lay his account with it. Indeed so well recognized is the custom that when the heir-apparent, who under the system of mother-kin must be a brother, a nephew, or a cousin on the mother's side, proves himself precocious and energetic, the people say, "The cousin is a grown man. The chiefs *tobolbel* is nigh at hand."<sup>4</sup>

The plot of death and its execution.

In such cases the plot of death is commonly so well hushed up that it seldom miscarries. The first care of the conspirators

is to purpose an old woman will sleep for some nights  
 discov in the  
 er house and make inquiries quietly, till like a sleuth-  
 where hound she has  
 the nosed the hoard. Then the conspirators come, and  
 doome the candidate  
 d man for the chieftainship despatches his predecessor either  
 keeps with his own  
 his hand or by the hand of a young cousin. Having done  
 money the deed he  
 . For takes possession of the official residence, and applies  
 this to the widow

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Christian, *The Caroline Islands* (London, 1899), pp. 290 sq.  
 Compare W. H. Furness, *The Island of Stone Money,, Uap of the Carolines* (Philadelphia and London, 1910), pp. 46 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Furness, *op. cit.* pp. 46 sq.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. Furness, *op. cit.* pp. 49 sq.

<sup>4</sup> J. Kubary, *Die sodalen Einrich-  
 ttungen der Pdauer*, p. 43.  
 The writer does not translate the word *tobolbel*, but the context sufficiently explains its meaning.